

tive "plot," which no one unravels but in which no one is allowed a lapse of attention or a lack of strictness. This is not the place to delve into the perspectives which then open up, from the point of view of the ethical significance of keeping watch and transcending, particularly on time and its diachrony in connection with the Uncontainable.

Useless Suffering

entre nous

Phenomenology

Suffering is, of course, a *datum* in consciousness, a certain "psychological content," similar to the lived experience of color, sound, contact, or any other sensation. But in this very "content" it is an in-spite-of-consciousness, the unassumable. The unassumable and "unassumability." "Unassumability" that does not result from the excessive intensity of a sensation, from just some quantitative "too much," surpassing the measure of our sensibility and our means of grasping and holding; but an excess, an unwelcome superfluity, that is inscribed in a sensorial content, penetrating, as suffering, the dimensions of meaning that seem to open themselves to it, or become grafted onto it. It is as if suffering were not just a *datum*, refractory to the synthesis of the Kantian "I think"—which is capable of reuniting and embracing the most heterogeneous and disparate data into order and meaning in its *a priori* forms—but the *way* in which the refusal, opposing the assemblage of data into a meaningful whole, rejects it; at once what disturbs order and this disturbance itself. It is not only the consciousness of rejection or a symptom of rejection, but this rejection itself: a backward consciousness, "operating" not as "grasp" but as revulsion. A modality. The categorial ambiguity of quality and modality. The denial, the refusal of meaning, thrusting itself forward as a sensible quality: that is, in the guise of "experienced" content, the *way* in which, within a consciousness, the unbearable is precisely

which pain does not just somehow innocently happen to "color" consciousness with affectivity. The evil of pain, the deleterious *per se*, is the outburst and deepest expression, so to speak, of absurdity.

Thus the least one can say about suffering is that, in its own phenomenon, intrinsically, it is useless: "for nothing." Doubtless this depth of meaninglessness that the analysis seems to suggest is confirmed by empirical situations of pain, in which pain remains undiluted, so to speak, and isolates itself in consciousness, or absorbs the rest of consciousness. It would suffice, for example, to take from the medical journals certain cases of persistent or obstinate pain, the neuralgias and intolerable lumbagos resulting from lesions of the peripheral nerves, and the tortures that are experienced by certain patients stricken with malignant tumors.² Pain can become the central phenomenon of the diseased state. These are the "pain-illnesses," to which the patient's other psychological states bring no relief but, on the contrary, anxiety and distress, adding to the cruelty of the pain. But we can go on—and doubtless thus arrive at the essential facts of pure pain—to consider the "pain-illnesses" of beings who are psychologically deprived, retarded, impoverished in their social life and impaired in their relation to the other person—that relation in which suffering, without losing anything of its savage malignancy, no longer eclipses the totality of the mental and moves into a new light, within new horizons. These horizons remain closed to the mentally deficient, except that the latter, in their "pure pain," are projected into them in exposing themselves to *me*, raising the fundamental ethical problem posed by pain "for nothing": the inevitable and preemptory ethical problem of medication, which is *my duty*. Is not the evil of suffering—extreme passivity, helplessness, abandonment and solitude—also the unassumable, whence the possibility of a half opening, and, more precisely, the half opening that a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh slips through—the original call for aid, for curative help, help from the other³ *me* whose alterity, whose exteriority promises salvation? Original opening toward merciful care, the point at which—through a demand for analgesia, more pressing, more urgent, in the groan, than a demand for consolation or the postponement of death—the anthropological category of the medical, a category that is primordial, irreducible and ethical, imposes itself. For pure suffering, which is intrinsically senseless and condemned to itself with no way out,

not borne, the manner of this not-being-borne; which, paradoxically, is itself a sensation or a datum. A quasi-contradictory structure, but a contradiction that is not formal, like that of the dialectic tension between the affirmative and the negative that occurs for the intellect. Contradiction *qua* sensation: the ache of pain—woe!

Suffering, in its woe, in its in-spite-of-consciousness, is passivity. In this case apprehension, a taking into the consciousness, is no longer, strictly speaking, a "taking," no longer *the performance of an act of consciousness*, but, in adversity, a submission—and even a submission to submission, since the "content" that suffering consciousness is conscious of is precisely this same adversity of suffering—its woe. But, here again, *passivity*—that is, a modality—signifies as a *quiddity*, and perhaps as the locus in which passivity signifies originally, independently of its conceptual opposition to activity. The passivity of suffering, in its pure phenomenology, abstracting from its psychophysical and psychophysiological conditions, is not the other side of any activity, as would be an effect correlative to its cause, or sensorial receptivity correlative to the "ob-stance" of the object that affects it and leaves its impression on it. The passivity of suffering is more profoundly passive than the receptivity of our senses, which is already active reception, immediately becoming perception. In suffering, sensibility is a vulnerability, more passive than receptivity; an encounter more passive than experience. It is precisely an evil. It is not, to tell the truth, through passivity that evil is described, but through evil that suffering is understood. Suffering is a pure undergoing. It is not a matter of a passivity that would degrade human beings by affecting their freedom, which would be curtailed to the point of compromising self-consciousness, thus leaving the human being, in the passivity of undergoing, the identity of a mere thing. The humanity of those who suffer is overwhelmed by the evil that rends it, otherwise than by non-freedom: violently and cruelly, more irremissibly than the negation that dominates or paralyzes the act in non-freedom. What counts in the non-freedom or the submission of suffering is the concreteness of the *not*, looming as an evil more negative than any apophantic *not*. This negativity of evil is probably the source or kernel of all apophantic negation. The *not* of evil, a negativity extending as far as to the realm of un-meaning. All evil relates back to suffering. It is the *impasse* of life and of being—their absurdity—in

to be sure, but with which it is rationalized or finds a way of justifying itself. Already within an isolated consciousness, the pain of suffering can take on the meaning of pain that wins merit and hopes for a reward, and so lose, it would appear, its modality of uselessness in various ways. Is it not meaningful as a means with an end in view, when it makes itself felt in the effort that goes into the preparation of a work, or in the fatigue resulting from it? One can see a biological finality in it: the role of an alarm signal manifesting itself for the preservation of life against the cunning dangers that threaten it in illness. "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow," says Ecclesiastes (1:18), where suffering appears at the very least as the price of reason and spiritual refinement. It is also thought to temper the individual's character. It is said to be necessary to the teleology of community life, when social discontent awakens a useful attention to the health of the collective body. Perhaps there is a social utility in the suffering necessary to the pedagogic function of Power in education, discipline and repression. Is not fear of punishment the beginning of wisdom? Do people not have the idea that suffering, undergone as punishment, regenerates the enemies of society and humankind? This political teleology is founded, to be sure, on the value of existence, on the perseverance in being of society and of the individual, on their health, taken as the supreme and ultimate end.

But the bad and gratuitous meaninglessness of pain already shows beneath the reasonable forms espoused by the social "uses" of suffering, which in any case do not diminish the outrage of the torture that strikes the psychically handicapped, isolating them in their pain. But behind the rational administration of pain in the penalties meted out by human courts, which immediately begin to look suspiciously like repression, the arbitrariness and strange failure of justice amidst wars, crimes and the oppression of the weak by the strong, rejoin, in a sort of fatality, the useless suffering that springs from natural plagues, as if they were the effects of an ontological perversion. Beyond the fundamental malignity of suffering itself, revealed in its phenomenology, does not human experience in history attest to a wickedness and an ill will?

Western humanity has nonetheless sought the meaning of this outrage by appealing to a meaning that would be peculiar to a metaphysical order and an ethics that are not visible in the immediate lessons of

a beyond appears in the form of the interhuman.⁴ It is seen in the light of such situations, be it said in passing, that medicine as technique, and consequently the technology as a whole that it presupposes—technology, so easily exposed to the attacks of "right-thinking" rigor—does not derive solely from the so-called "will to power." That bad will is perhaps only the price that must sometimes be paid by the high-mindedness of a civilization called upon to feed human beings and to lighten their sufferings.

A high-mindedness that is the honor of a still uncertain, still vacillating modernity, emerging at the end of a century of unutterable suffering, but in which the suffering of suffering, the suffering for the useless suffering of the other, the just suffering in me for the unjustifiable suffering of the other, opens suffering to the ethical perspective of the inter-human. In this perspective there is a radical difference between *the suffering in the other*, where it is unforgivable to *me*, solicits me and calls me, and suffering *in me*,⁵ my own experience of suffering, whose constitutional or congenital uselessness can take on a meaning, the only one of which suffering is capable, in becoming a suffering for the suffering (inexorable though it may be) of someone else. It is this attention to the suffering of the other that, through the cruelties of our century (despite these cruelties, because of these cruelties) can be affirmed as the very nexus of human subjectivity, to the point of being raised to the level of supreme ethical principle—the only one it is impossible to question—shaping the hopes and commanding the practical discipline of vast human groups. This attention and this action are so imperiously and directly incumbent on human beings (on their *I*'s) that it makes awaiting them from an all-powerful God impossible without our lowering ourselves. The consciousness of this inescapable obligation brings us close to God in a more difficult, but also a more spiritual, way than does confidence in any kind of theodicy.

Theodicy

In the ambiguity of suffering that the above phenomenological essay has shown, the modality averred itself also to be the content or sensation that consciousness "bears." That adversity-to-all-harmony, as a quiddity, enters into conjunction with other "contents" that it disturbs,

USELESS SUFFERING 94

USELESS SUFFERING 94

USELESS SUFFERING 94

USELESS SUFFERING 94

USELESS SUFFERING 94

USELESS SUFFERING 94

USELESS SUFFERING 94

USELESS SUFFERING 94

the Christians' major reference to Original Sin, this theodicy is in a certain sense implicit in the Old Testament, in which the drama of the Diaspora reflects the sins of Israel. The misconduct of the ancestors, still unexpiated by the sufferings of the exile, explained to the exiles themselves the length and harshness of that exile.

The End of Theodicy

Perhaps the most revolutionary fact of our twentieth-century consciousness—but it is also an event in Sacred History—is that of the destruction of all balance between Western thought's explicit and implicit theodicy and the forms that suffering and its evil are taking on in the very unfolding of this century. This is the century that in thirty years has known two world wars, the totalitarianisms of right and left, Hitlerism and Stalinism, Hiroshima, the Gulag, and the genocides of Auschwitz and Cambodia. This is the century that is drawing to a close in the obsessive fear of the return of everything these barbaric names stood for: suffering and evil inflicted deliberately, but in a manner no reason set limits to, in the exasperation⁶ of a reason become political and detached from all ethics.

Among these events the Holocaust of the Jewish people under the reign of Hitler seems to me the paradigm of gratuitous human suffering, in which evil appears in its diabolical horror. This is perhaps not a subjective feeling. The disproportion between suffering and every theodicy was shown at Auschwitz with a glaring, obvious clarity. Its possibility puts into question the multimillennial traditional faith. Did not Nietzsche's saying about the death of God take on, in the extermination camps, the meaning of a quasi-empirical fact? Should it be a source of surprise, then, that this drama of Sacred History has had among its principal actors a people that has forever been associated with that history, whose collective soul and destiny would be wrongly understood as limited to any sort of nationalism, and whose historic deeds, in certain circumstances, still belong to the Revelation (be it as apocalypse) that gives philosophers "food for thought," or keeps them from being able to think?⁷

Here I wish to recall the analysis that the Canadian Jew, the philoso-

moral consciousness. This is the kingdom of transcendent ends, willed by a benevolent wisdom, by the absolute goodness of a God who is in a sense defined by that super-natural goodness; or a goodness invisibly disseminated in Nature and History, whose paths, indeed painful but leading to the Good, benevolent wisdom would direct. This is pain henceforth meaningful, subordinated in one way or another to the metaphysical finality glimpsed by faith or belief in progress. Beliefs presupposed by theodicy! That is the grand idea necessary to the inner peace of souls in our distressed world. It is called upon to make sufferings here below comprehensible. These will make sense within the framework of an original sin or the congenital finitude of human being. The evil that fills the earth would be explained by a "grand design"; it would be destined to the atonement of a sin, or announce, to the ontologically limited consciousness, compensation or recompense at the end of time. These supra-sensible perspectives are invoked in order to divine, in a suffering that is essentially gratuitous and absurd, and apparently arbitrary, a meaning and an order.

Certainly one may inquire into whether theodicy, in the broad and narrow senses of the term, effectively succeeds in making God innocent or in saving morality in the name of faith or in making suffering bearable, or into the true intent of the thought that has recourse to theodicy. It is impossible, in any case, to underestimate the temptation of theodicy, and to fail to recognize the profundity of the empire it exerts over humankind, and the *epochemachend* (or, as one says these days, the *his-torial*) character of its entry into thought. It has been, at least up to the trials of the twentieth century, a component of the self-consciousness of European humanity. It persisted in watered-down form at the core of atheist progressivism, which was confident of the efficacy of the Good that is immanent in being and destined to visible triumph by the simple play of the natural and historical laws of injustice, war, misery and illness. Providential Nature and History, which furnished the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the norms of moral consciousness, have many links to the Deism of the Enlightenment. But theodicy, although Leibniz did not give it its name until 1710, is as old as a certain reading of the Bible. It dominated the consciousness of believers who explained their misfortunes by reference to Sin, or at least to their sins. Alongside

pher Emil Fackenheim of Toronto, has made of this catastrophe of the human and the divine in his work, and particularly in his book *God's Presence in History*.

The Nazi Genocide of the Jewish people has no precedent within Jewish history. Nor . . . will one find a precedent outside Jewish history. . . . Even actual cases of genocide, however, still differ from the Nazi holocaust in at least two respects. Whole peoples have been killed for "rational" (however horrifying) ends such as power, territory, wealth. . . . The Nazi murder . . . was annihilation for the sake of annihilation, murder for the sake of murder, evil for the sake of evil. Still more incontestably unique than the crime itself is the situation of the victims. The Albigensians died for their faith, believing unto death that God needs martyrs. Negro Christians have been murdered for their race, able to find comfort in a faith not at issue. The more than one million Jewish children murdered in the Nazi holocaust died neither because of their faith, nor despite their faith, nor for reasons unrelated to the Jewish faith [but] because of the Jewish faith of their great-grandparents [who brought] up Jewish children.⁸

The inhabitants of the Eastern European Jewish communities constituted the majority of the six million tortured and massacred; they resented the human beings least corrupted by the ambiguities of our world, and the million children killed had the innocence of children. Theirs is the death of martyrs, a death inflicted in the torturers' unceasing destruction of the dignity that belongs to martyrs. The final act of this destruction is being accomplished today in the posthumous denial of the very fact of martyrdom by the would-be "revisionists of history." Pain in its undiluted malignity, suffering for nothing. It renders impossible and odious every proposal and every thought that would explain it by the sins of those who have suffered or are dead. But does not this end of theodicy, which imposes itself in the face of this century's inordinate trial, at the same time and in a more general way reveal the unjustifiable character of suffering in the other, the outrage it would be for me to justify my neighbor's suffering?

Thus the very phenomenon of suffering in its uselessness is, in principle, the pain of the other. For an ethical sensibility, confirming, in the

inhumanity of our time, its opposition to this inhumanity, the justification of the neighbor's pain is certainly the source of all immorality. Accusing oneself in suffering is undoubtedly the very turning back of the / to itself. It is perhaps thus that the for-the-other—the most upright relation to the other—is the most profound adventure of subjectivity, its ultimate intimacy. But this intimacy can only be discreetly. It cannot give itself out as an example, or be narrated in an edifying discourse. It cannot, without becoming perverted, be made into a preaching.

The philosophical problem, then, that is posed by the useless pain that appears in its fundamental malignancy through the events of the twentieth century, concerns the meaning that religiosity, but also the human morality of goodness, can continue to have after the end of theodicy. According to the philosopher we have just quoted, Auschwitz would paradoxically entail a revelation from the very God who nevertheless was silent at Auschwitz: a commandment of faithfulness. To renounce after Auschwitz this God absent from Auschwitz—no longer to assure the continuation of Israel—would amount to finishing the criminal enterprise of National Socialism, which aimed at the annihilation of Israel and the forgetting of the ethical message of the Bible, which Judaism bears, and whose multimillennial history is concretely prolonged by Israel's existence as a people. For if God was absent in the extermination camps, the devil was very obviously present. Hence, in Emil Fackenheim's view, the obligation for Jews to live and to remain Jews, in order not to be made accomplices of a diabolical project. Jews, after Auschwitz, are pledged to their faithfulness to Judaism and to the material and even political conditions of its existence.

That final reflection of the philosopher from Toronto, formulated in terms that make it relative to the destiny of the Jewish people, can be given a universal meaning. The portion of humanity that, from Sarajevo to Cambodia, witnessed a host of cruelties in the course of a century in which its Europe, with its "human sciences," seemed to have fully explored its subject—the humanity that, during all these horrors, breathed—already or still—the smoke from the ovens of the "final solution" crematoria where theodicy abruptly appeared impossible—will it, in indifference, abandon the world to useless suffering, leaving it to the political fatality—or drifting—of blind forces that inflict misfortune on the weak and conquered, while sparing the conquerors, with

98 USELESS SUFFERING

98 USELESS SUFFERING

98 USELESS SUFFERING

98 USELESS SUFFERING

98 USELESS SUFFERING

98 USELESS SUFFERING

98 USELESS SUFFERING

98 USELESS SUFFERING

neither the sufficient condition nor the necessary outcome of ethics. In its ethical position, the *I* is distinct both from the citizen born of the City, and from the individual who precedes all order in his natural egotism, but from whom political philosophy, since Hobbes, has tried to derive—or succeeded in deriving—the social or political order of the City.

The interhuman is also in the recourse that people have to one another for help, before the astonishing alterity of the other has been banalized or dimmed down to a simple exchange of courtesies that has become established as an “interpersonal commerce” of customs. I have spoken of this in the first section of this study. These are expressions of a properly ethical meaning, distinct from those acquired by *self* and *other* in what is called the state of Nature or civil society. It is in the interhuman perspective of *my* responsibility for the other, without concern for reciprocity, in my call for his or her disinterested help, in the asymmetry of the relation of *one* to the *other*, that I have tried to analyze the phenomenon of useless suffering.

whom the shrewd are not slow to align themselves? Or, incapable of adhering to an order—or a disorder—that it continues to think diabolical, must not humanity now, in a faith more difficult than before, in a faith without theodicy, continue to live out Sacred History; a history that now demands even more from the resources of the *I* in each one of us, and from its suffering inspired by the suffering of the other, from its compassion which is a non-useless suffering (or love), which is no longer suffering “for nothing,” and immediately has meaning? At the end of the twentieth century and after the useless and unjustifiable pain which is exposed and displayed therein without any shadow of a consoling theodicy,⁹ are we not all committed—like the Jewish people to their faithfulness—to the second term of this alternative? This is a new modality in the faith of today, and even in our moral certitudes; a modality most essential to the modernity that is dawning.

The Interhuman Order

To envisage suffering, as I have just attempted to do, in the interhuman perspective—that is, as meaningful in me, useless in the Other—does not consist in adopting a relative point of view on it, but in restoring it to the dimensions of meaning outside of which the immanent and savage concreteness of evil in a consciousness is but an abstraction. To think suffering in an interhuman perspective does not amount to seeing it in the coexistence of a multiplicity of consciousnesses, or in a social determinism, accompanied by a simple knowledge that people in society can have of their proximity or of their common destiny. The interhuman perspective can subsist, but can also be lost, in the political order of the City where the Law establishes mutual obligations between citizens. The interhuman, properly speaking, lies in a non-indifference of one to another, in a responsibility of one for another, but before the reciprocity of this responsibility, which will be inscribed in impersonal laws, comes to be superimposed on the pure altruism of this responsibility inscribed in the ethical position of the *I qua I*. It is prior to any contract that would specify precisely the moment of reciprocity—a point at which altruism and disinterestedness may, to be sure, continue, but at which they may also diminish or die out. The order of politics (post-ethical or pre-ethical) that inaugurates the “social contract” is

QUESTION: *"The Face of the Other is perhaps the very beginning of philosophy." Do you mean to say that philosophy does not begin with and in the experience of finitude, but rather in that of the Infinite as the call of justice? Does philosophy begin before itself, in an experience prior to philosophical discourse?*

EMMANUEL LEVINAS: My main point in saying that was that the order of meaning, which seems to me primary, is precisely what comes to us from the inter-human relationship, so that the Face, with all its meaningfulness as brought out by analysis, is the beginning of intelligibility. Of course the whole perspective of ethics immediately emerges here; but we cannot say that it is already philosophy. Philosophy is a theoretical discourse; I thought that the theoretical presupposes more. It is inasmuch as I have not only to respond to the Face of the other, but alongside him to approach the third party, that the necessity for the theoretical attitude arises.

From the start, the encounter with the Other is my responsibility for him. That is the responsibility for my neighbor, which is, no doubt, the harsh name for what we call love of one's neighbor; love without Eros, charity, love in which the ethical aspect dominates the passionate aspect, love without concupiscentia. I don't very much like the word love, which is worn-out and debased. Let us speak instead of the taking upon oneself of the fate of the other. That is the "vision" of the Face, and it applies to the first

important to me), the relationship with the other is not symmetrical, it is not at all as Martin Buber. When I say *Thou* to an *I*, to a me, according to Buber I would always have that me before me as the one who says *Thou* to me. Consequently, there would be a reciprocal relationship. According to my analysis, on the other hand, in the relation to the Face, it is asymmetry that is affirmed: at the outset I hardly care what the other is with respect to me, that is his own business; for me, he is above all the one I am responsible for.

Q: *Does the executioner have a Face?*

E.L.: You are posing the whole problem of evil. When I speak of Justice, I introduce the idea of the struggle with evil, I separate myself from the idea of nonresistance to evil. If self-defense is a problem, the "executioner" is the one who threatens my neighbor and, in this sense, calls for violence and no longer has a Face. But my central idea is what I called an "asymmetry of intersubjectivity": the exceptional situation of the *I*. I always recall Dostoyevsky on this subject. One of his characters says: "We are all guilty for everything and everyone, and I more than all the others." But to this idea—without contradicting it—I immediately add the concern for the third and, hence, justice. So the whole problematic of the executioner is opened here; in terms of justice and the defense of the other, my fellow, and not at all in terms of the threat that concerns me. If there were no order of Justice, there would be no limit to my responsibility. There is a certain measure of violence necessary in terms of justice; but if one speaks of justice, it is necessary to allow judges, it is necessary to allow institutions and the state; to live in a world of citizens, and not only in the order of the Face to Face.

But, on the other hand, it is in terms of the relation to the Face or of me before the other that we can speak of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the state. A state in which the interpersonal relationship is impossible, in which it is directed in advance by the determinism proper to the state, is a totalitarian state. So there is a limit to the state. Whereas, in Hobbes's vision—in which the state emerges not from the limitation of charity, but from the limitation of violence—one cannot set a limit on the state.

comer. If he were my only interlocutor, I would have had nothing but obligations! But I don't live in a world in which there is but one single "first comer"; there is always a third party in the world: he or she is also my other, my fellow. Hence, it is important to me to know which of the two takes precedence. Is the one not the persecutor of the other? Must not human beings, who are incomparable, be compared? Thus justice, here, takes precedence over the taking upon oneself of the fate of the other.

I must judge, where before I was to assume responsibilities. Here is the birth of the theoretical; here the concern for justice is born, which is the basis of the theoretical. But it is always starting out from the Face, from the responsibility for the other that justice appears, which calls for judgment and comparison, a comparison of what is in principle incomparable, for every being is unique; every other is unique. In that necessity of being concerned with justice that idea of equity appears, on which the idea of objectivity is based. At a certain moment, there is a necessity for a "weighing," a comparison, a pondering, and in this sense philosophy would be the appearance of wisdom from the depths of that initial charity; it would be—and I am not playing on words—the wisdom of that charity, the wisdom of love.

Q: *Would the experience of the death of the other, and in a sense, the experience of death itself, be alien to the ethical reception of one's neighbor?*

E.L.: Now you are posing the problem: "What is there in the Face?" In my analysis, the Face is definitely not a plastic form like a portrait; the relation to the Face is both the relation to the absolutely weak—to what is absolutely exposed, what is bare and destitute, the relation with bareness and consequently with what is alone and can undergo the supreme isolation we call death—and there is, consequently, in the Face of the Other always the death of the Other and thus, in some way, an incitement to murder, the temptation to go to the extreme, to completely neglect the other—and at the same time (and this is the paradoxical thing) the Face is also the "Thou Shalt not Kill." A *Thou-Shalt-not-Kill* that can also be explicated much further: it is the fact that I cannot let the other die alone, it is like a calling out to me. And you see (and this seems

Q: Does gentleness belong to religion?

E.L.: What responsibility lacks as a principle of human individuation is that God perhaps helps you to be responsible; that is gentleness. But to deserve the help of God, it is necessary to want to do what must be done without his help. I am not getting into that question theologially. I am describing ethics: it is the human *qua* human. I think that ethics is not an invention of the white race, of a humanity which has read the Greek authors in school and gone through a specific evolution. The only absolute value is the human possibility of giving the other priority over oneself. I don't think that there is a human group that can take exception to that ideal, even if it is declared an ideal of holiness. I am not saying that the human being is a saint, I'm saying that he or she is the one who has understood that holiness is indisputable. This is the beginning of philosophy, this is the rational, the intelligible. In saying that, it sounds as if we are getting away from reality. But we forget our relation to *books*—that is, to inspired language—which speaks of nothing else. The book of books, and all literature, which is perhaps only a premonition or recollection of the Bible. One is easily led to suspect pure bookishness and the hypocrisy of bookishness in our books, forgetting the depth of our relationship to the book. All humanity has books, be they but books before books: the inspired language of proverbs, fables, and even folklore. The human being is not only in the world, not only an *inder-Welt-Sein*, but also *zum-Buch-Sein* [being-toward-the-book] in relationship to the inspired Word, an ambiance as important for our existence as streets, houses, and clothing. The book is wrongly interpreted as pure *Zuhandenes*, as what is at hand, a manual. My relation to the book is definitely not pure use; it doesn't have the same meaning as the one I have with the hammer or the telephone.

Q: On this relation between philosophy and religion, don't you think that, at the origin of philosophizing, there is an intuition of being that would be close to religion?

E.L.: I would say, yes, insofar as I say that the relation to the other is the beginning of the intelligible. I cannot describe the relation to God with-

Q: And the relation between justice and love?

E.L.: Justice comes from love. That definitely doesn't mean to say that the rigor of justice can't be turned against love understood in terms of responsibility. Politics, left to itself, has its own determinism. Love must always watch over justice. In Jewish theology—I am not guided by that theology explicitly—God is the God of justice, but his principal attribute is mercy. In talmudic language, God is always called *Rachmanah*, the Merciful: this whole topic is studied in rabbinic exegesis. Why are there two accounts of creation? Because the Eternal—called *Elohim* in the first account—wanted at first (all that is only a fable, of course) to create a world sustained solely by justice. It didn't hold up. The second account, in which the Tetragrammaton appears, attests to the intervention of mercy.

Q: So, love is originary?

E.L.: Love is originary. I'm not speaking theologially at all; I myself don't use it much, the word love, it is a worn-out and ambiguous word. And then, too, there is something severe in this love; this love is commanded. In my last book, which is called *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*,² there is an attempt (outside all theology) to ask at what moment the word of God is heard. It is inscribed in the Face of the Other, in the encounter with the Other: a double expression of weakness and strict, urgent requirement. Is that the word of God? A word that requires me as the one responsible for the Other; and there is an election there, because that responsibility is inalienable. A responsibility you yield to someone is no longer a responsibility. I substitute myself for every man and no one can substitute for me, and in that sense I am chosen. Let us think again of my quotation from Dostoyevsky. I have always thought that election is definitely not a privilege; it is the fundamental characteristic of the human person as morally responsible. Responsibility is an individuation, a principle of individuation. On the famous problem: "Is man individuated by matter, or individuated by form," I support individuation by responsibility for the other. It also is hard; I leave the whole consoling side of this ethics to religion.

Q: *In this relation to the Other, as you said, consciousness loses its first place . . . ?*

E.L.: Yes, subjectivity, as responsible, is a subjectivity which is commanded at the outset; heteronomy is somehow stronger than autonomy here, except that this heteronomy is not slavery, is not bondage. As if certain purely formal relationships, when they are filled with content, could have a stronger content than the formal necessity they signify. *A* commanding *B* is a formula of *B*'s non-freedom; but if *B* is the human being and *A* is God, the subordination is not servitude; on the contrary, it is an appeal to the human being. We must not always formalize: Nietzsche thought that if God exists, the *I* is impossible. That can be very convincing. If *A* commands *B*, *B* is no longer autonomous, no longer has subjectivity; but when, in thinking, you do not remain on the level of form, when you think in terms of content, a situation called heteronomy has a completely different signification. The consciousness of responsibility immediately imposed is certainly not in the nominative, it is rather in the accusative. It is "ordered," and the word "to order" is very good in French: when you become a priest, you are ordained, you take orders; but in reality, you receive powers. The word "*ordonné*" in French means both having received orders and having been consecrated. It is in that sense that I can say that consciousness, subjectivity, no longer have first place in their relationship to the other.

My view is opposed to the tendency of one whole portion of contemporary philosophy that prefers to see in man a simple articulation or a simple aspect of a rational, ontological system that has nothing human about it; even in Heidegger, the *Dasein* is ultimately a structure of being in general, bound to its profession of being, "its historic deeds of being," its event of being. The human is not the entire meaning of being; man is a being who comprehends being and, in that sense, is the manifestation of it, and only thus does he concern philosophy.

Similarly, in certain trends in structuralist research, rules, pure forms, universal structures, combinations which have a legality as cold as mathematical legality are isolated. And then that dominates the human. In Merleau-Ponty, you have a very beautiful passage in which he analyzes the way one hand touches the other.⁴ One hand touches the other, the other hand touches the first; the hand, consequently, is

out speaking of my concern for the other. When I speak to a Christian, I always quote Matthew 25; the relation to God is presented there as a relation to another person. It is not a metaphor: in the other, there is a real presence of God. In my relation to the other, I hear the Word of God. It is not a metaphor; it is not only extremely important, it is literally true. I'm not saying that the other is God, but that in his or her Face I hear the Word of God.

Q: *It is a mediator between God and us?*

E.L.: Oh, no, not at all, it is not mediation—it is the way the word of God reverberates.

Q: *There is no difference?*

E.L.: Now hold on a minute. Now we're getting into theology!

Q: *What is the relationship between the Other [l'Autre] and the Other Person [Autrui]?*

E.L.: To me, the Other Person [*Autrui*] is the other human being. Shall we do a bit of theology? In the Old Testament, you know, God also comes down to mankind. God the Father descends, for example, in Genesis 9,5,15 [sic]³ and Numbers 11:17, Exodus 19:18. There is no separation between the Father and the Word; it is in the form of speech, in the form of an ethical order, an order to love, that the descent of God takes place. It is in the Face of the Other [*Autre*] that the commandment comes which interrupts the progress of the world. Why would I feel responsible in the presence of the Face? That is Cain's answer when someone says to him: "Where is your brother?" He answers: "Am I my brother's keeper?" That is the Face of the Other taken as an image among images, and when the Word of God it bears is not recognized. We must not take Cain's answer as if he were mocking God or as if he were answering as a little boy: "It isn't me, it's the other one." Cain's answer is sincere. Ethics is the only thing lacking in his answer; there is only ontology: I am I, and he is he. We are separate ontological beings.

Q: *This is the excellence of multiplicity?*

E.L.: This is the excellence of the multiple, which evidently can be thought as a degradation of the one. To cite another verse, created man is blessed with a command to "multiply." In ethical and religious terms: you will have someone to love, you will have someone for whom to exist, you cannot be just for yourself. He created them man and woman at the outset, "man and woman created He them." While at every moment, for us Europeans, for me and for you, the essential thing is to approach unity. The essential thing is fusion. We say that love is a fusion, that it triumphs in fusion. Diotima, in Plato's *Symposium*, says that love as such is a demigod, precisely because he is only separation and desire for the other.

Q: *In this perspective, what, according to you, would be the difference between Eros and Agape?*

E.L.: I am definitely not a Freudian; consequently I don't think that Agape comes from Eros. But I don't deny that sexuality is also an important philosophical problem; the meaning of the division of the human into man and woman is not reduced to a biological problem. I used to think that otherness began in the feminine. That is, in fact, a very strange otherness: woman is neither the contradictory nor the opposite of man, nor like other differences. It is not like the opposition between light and darkness. It is a distinction that is not contingent, and whose place must be sought in relation to love.

I can say no more about it now; I think in any case that Eros is definitely not Agape, that Agape is neither a derivative nor the extinction of love-Eros. Before Eros there was the Face; Eros itself is possible only between Faces. The problem of Eros is philosophical and concerns otherness. Thirty years ago I wrote a book called *Le temps et l'autre* [*Time and the Other*]⁶—in which I thought that the feminine was otherness itself; and I do not retract that, but I have never been a Freudian. In *Totalité et Infini* [*Totality and Infinity*],⁷ there is a chapter on Eros, which is described as love that becomes enjoyment, whereas I have a grave view of Agape in terms of responsibility for the other.

touched and touches the touching—one hand touches the touching. A reflexive structure: it is as if space were touching itself through man. What is pleasing here is, perhaps, that nonhuman—nonhumanist, right?—structure in which man is only an aspect. In the same distrust with regard to humanism according to contemporary philosophy there is a battle against the notion of the subject. What they want is a principle of intelligibility that is no longer enveloped by the human; they want the subject to appeal to a principle that would not be enveloped by concern for human fate.

On the contrary, when I say that consciousness in the relationship with the other loses its first place, it is not in that sense; I mean to say that, in consciousness thus conceived, there is the awakening to humanity. The humanity of consciousness is definitely not in its powers, but in its responsibility: in passivity, in reception, in obligation with regard to the other. It is the other who is first, and there the question of my sovereign consciousness is no longer the first question. I advocate, as in the title of one of my books, the humanism of the other man.⁸

One last thing that is very close to my heart. In this whole priority of the relationship to the other, there is a break with a great traditional idea of the excellence of unity. The relation would already be a deprivation of this unity. That is the Plotinian tradition. My idea consists in conceiving sociality as independent of the "lost" unity.

Q: *Is that the origin of your criticism of Western philosophy as egology?*

E.L.: As egology, yes. If you read the *Enneads*, the One doesn't even have consciousness of self; if it did have consciousness of self, it would already be multiple, as a loss of perfection. In knowledge, one is two, even when one is alone. Even when one assumes consciousness of self, there is already a split. The various relations that can exist in man and in being are always judged according to their proximity or distance from unity. What is relation? What is time? A fall from unity, a fall from eternity. There are many theologians in all religions who say that the good life is a coincidence with God; coincidence, that is, the return to unity. Whereas in the insistence on the relation to the other in responsibility for him or her the excellence of sociality itself is affirmed; in theological terms, proximity to God, society with God.

E.L.: Inertia is certainly the great law of being; but the human looms up in it and can disturb it. For a long time? For a moment? The human is a scandal in being, a "sickness" of being for the realists, but not evil.

Q: *The madness of the Cross?*

E.L.: Yes, certainly, if you like, that suits the idea I just expressed, and there are equivalent ideas in Jewish thought. There is the history of the Jewish people itself. This idea of the crisis of being describes for me something which is specifically human and certainly corresponds to its prophetic instants. In the very structure of prophecy, a temporality is opened up, breaking with the "rigor" of being, with eternity understood as presence which does not pass away.

Q: *Is it the opening up of time?*

E.L.: Yes, there is the time that one can understand in terms of presence and the present, and in which the past is only a retained present and the future a present to come. Re-presentation would be the fundamental modality of mental life. But, in terms of the ethical relationship with the other, I glimpse a temporality in which the dimensions of the past and the future have their own signification. In my responsibility for the other, the past of the other, which has never been my present, "concerns me": it is not a re-presentation for me. The past of the other and, in a sense, the history of humanity in which I have never participated, in which I have never been present, is my past. As for the future—it is not my anticipation of a present which is already waiting for me, all ready, and like the imperturbable order of being, "as if it had already arrived," as if temporality were a synchrony. The future is the time of prophecy, which is also an imperative, a moral order, herald of an inspiration. I have tried to present the essence of these ideas in a study that will soon appear: a future that is not a simple to-come [*à-venir*]. The infinity of time doesn't frighten me; I think that it is the very movement of the to-God, and that time is better than eternity which is an exasperation of the "present," an idealization of the present.

Q: *You see Heidegger as a continuator of Western philosophy who maintains the primacy of the Same over the Other . . .*

Q: *You say that "the responsibility for the other comes from the hither side of my freedom." It is the problematic of the awakening-reawakening. To reawaken is to discover oneself responsible for the other; it is to discover oneself always-in-debt, on the hither side of freedom itself. To wake up and to respond: are they the same thing? To discover oneself-in-debt: is that already to respond? Or, between "discovering oneself" and "responding," is there not freedom? (A possibility of bad faith, of nonresponse.)*

E.L.: What is important is that the relation to the other is awakening and sobering up—that awakening is obligation. You say to me: Isn't that obligation preceded by a free decision? What matters to me is, in the responsibility for the other, something like an older involvement than any rememberable deliberation constitutive of the human. It is evident that there is in man the possibility of not awakening to the other; there is the possibility of evil. Evil is the order of being pure and simple—and, on the contrary, to go toward the other is the penetration of the human into being, an "otherwise than being."

I am not at all certain that the "otherwise than being" is guaranteed to triumph. There can be periods during which the human is completely extinguished, but the ideal of holiness is what humanity has introduced into being. An ideal of holiness contrary to the laws of being. Reciprocal actions and reactions, compensation for forces expended, the regaining of an equilibrium, whatever the wars, whatever the "cruelties" that take cover in that indifferent language that passes for justice: such is the law of being. Without illness, without exception, without disorder—that is the order of being.

I have no illusions; most of the time, things happen that way and it will probably recur. Humanity attains friendship, even when it seems to be broken off, but also constructs a political order in which the determinism of being can reappear. I have no illusions about it and I have no optimistic philosophy for the end of history. Perhaps the religions have a deeper insight into such things. But the human consists in acting without letting yourself be guided by these menacing possibilities. That is what the awakening to the human is. And there have been just men and saints in history.

Q: *Is being also inertia, the fact of not responding, of not awakening to another?*

Q: *It is an open question . . .*

E.L.: Yes, it is open. Don't worry; I'm not a fool. I could not fail to recognize Heidegger's speculative greatness. But the emphasis in his analyses is elsewhere. I repeat, they are brilliant analyses. But what does fear for the other mean in his theory of *Beifindlichkeit*? To me, it is an essential moment; I even think that fearing God primarily means fearing for the other. Fear for the other doesn't enter into the Heideggerian analysis of *Beifindlichkeit* because in that theory—a very admirable theory of double intentionality—all emotion, all fear is finally emotion for self, fear for self, fear of the dog but anguish for self.

But then what of fear for the other? Obviously that fear could be interpreted as fear for self, on the pretext that in fearing for the other I may be afraid of being in the same situation as the other. But that is not what fear for the other really is. The mother who fears for the child, or even, each of us who fears for a friend, is afraid for the other. (But every "other man" is a friend. Do you see what I mean?)

As if by chance, in chapter 19 of *Leviticus*, certain verses that end with "And thou shalt fear God" concern prohibitions of bad acts concerning the other man. Doesn't the theory of *Beifindlichkeit* come up short here?

Q: *Do you think that Heidegger would make a kind of sacralization of the world, and that his thought represents a culmination of paganism?*

E.L.: Whatever the case may be, he has a very great sense for everything that is part of the landscape; not the artistic landscape, but the place in which man is enrooted. It is absolutely not a philosophy of the émigré! I would even say that it is not a philosophy of the emigrant. To me, being a migrant is not being a nomad. Nothing is more enrooted than the nomad. But he or she who emigrates is fully human: the migration of man does not destroy, does not demolish the meaning of being.

Q: *Do you think that, in Heidegger, it is a question of geographical enrootedness? For example, reading your text in Difficile Liberté on Heidegger and Gagarin,⁹ one has the impression that enrootedness in Heidegger, as you interpret it, is a local enrootedness, on a geographical space. Is that what Heidegger has in mind, or is it not rather an enrootedness in the world?*

E.L.: For me, Heidegger is the greatest philosopher of the century, perhaps one of the very great philosophers of the millennium; but I am very pained by that because I can never forget what he was in 1933, even if he was that for only a short period. What I admire in his work is *Sein und Zeit*. It is a peak of phenomenology. The analyses are brilliant. As for the later Heidegger, I am much less familiar with him. What scares me a little is also the development of a discourse in which the human becomes an articulation of an anonymous or neutral intelligibility, to which the revelation of God is subordinated. In the *Geviert*,⁸ there are gods in the plural.

Q: *In terms of the ontological difference Heidegger establishes between beings and being, might one not think that Heideggerian being would correspond to a certain extent to the "other than being"?*

E.L.: No, I don't think so. Besides, otherwise than being isn't a "something." It is the relation to the other, the ethical relation. In Heidegger, the ethical relation, the *Miteinandersein*, the being-with-another-person, is only one moment of our presence in the world. It does not have the central place. *Mit* is always being next to . . . it is not in the first instance the Face, it is *zusammensein* [being-together], perhaps *zusammenschieben* [marching-together].

Q: *True, it is a moment; but might one not also say that, at the same time, it is an essential structure of the Dasein?*

E.L.: Yes, certainly, but we have always known that man is a social animal. That is definitely not the meaning I'm looking for. . . . They say that in my view—I am often criticized for this—there is an underestimation of the world. In Heidegger, the world is very important. In the *Feldwege*, there is a tree; you don't find men there.

Q: *And a structure or a moment such as the Fürsorge, the assistance to the other?*

E.L.: Yes, but I don't believe he thinks that giving, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked is the meaning of being or that it is above the task of being.

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 116

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 116

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 116

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 116

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 116

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 116

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 116

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 116

E.L.: I read Buber very late, and Marcel too; but I said in a little article soon to be published¹¹ that whoever has walked on Buber's ground owes allegiance to Buber, even if he didn't know where he was. It is as if you were about to cross the frontier without knowing it; you owe obedience to the country where you are. It is Buber who identified that ground, saw the theme of The Other, the *Du*, the *Thou*. Marcel is also very close to me; but I find that, in Marcel, dialogue is finally overwhelmed by ontology. There is in Marcel the concern to prolong traditional ontology: God is Being. The idea that God is something other than being, beyond being, as Marion says (Have you read Marion's book, *Dieu sans l'Être*?),¹² must have frightened him.

Q: *Various attempts have been made, notably in Latin America, to establish a synthesis of your philosophy and Marxism. What do you think of that?*

E.L.: I knew Dussel, who used to quote me a lot, and who is now much closer to political, even geopolitical thought. Moreover, I have gotten to know a very sympathetic South American group that is working out a "liberation philosophy" — Scannone in particular. We had a meeting here, with Bernhard Casper, a friend of mine who is a professor of theology at Freiburg, and some Catholic philosophers from South America. There is a very interesting attempt there to return to the spirit of the people in South America, along with a great influence of Heidegger in the manner—the rhythm—of developing topics, and in the radicalism of the questioning. I am very happy, very proud even, when I find reflections of my work in this group. It is a fundamental approval. It means that some people have also seen "the same thing."

Q: *Can your thought, which is a thought of love, be reconciled with a philosophy of conquest, such as Marxism?*

E.L.: No, in Marxism, there is not just conquest; there is recognition of the other. True enough, it consists in saying: We can save the other if he himself demands his due. Marxism invites humanity to demand what it is my duty to give it. That is a bit different from my radical distinction between me and others, but Marxism cannot be condemned for that.

E.L.: But the human is lived, is described, always in the same landscape. When you have been on the moon a bit, you certainly return to the world as to your village. But Heidegger said that one cannot live in geometrical space. Gagarin didn't settle in geometrical space since he returned to earth, but he was able to make geometrical space his place and the place of his professional activity.

Q: *Is the world in Heidegger in fact something other than the terrestrial world, other than identification with a landscape?*

E.L.: They say that my article on Gagarin and Heidegger went too far. There are texts in Heidegger on the place of man in Central Europe. Europe and the German West are central to him. There is a whole geopolitics in Heidegger.

Q: *What is the influence of Rosenzweig on your thought?*

E.L.: It is his critique of totality, his critique of Hegel that has given me the most, and I have been very appreciative of the idea that initial intelligibility—Rosenzweig's great idea—is the juncture of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. These are not late and derived notions (it hardly matters at what moment they appear in history) but the source of all meaning. I reiterated this in the preface I wrote for Stéphane Mosès's book on Rosenzweig.¹⁰ In Rosenzweig's work, the abstract aspects of time—past, present, future—are deformed; it is no longer a question of time, an empty form in which there are three formal dimensions. The past is Creation. It is as if Rosenzweig were saying: to think the past concretely, you have to think Creation. Or, the future is Redemption; the present is Revelation. What I retain is definitely not that second or third identification, but that very precocious idea that certain formal notions are not fully intelligible except in a concrete event, which seems even more irrational than they are, but in which they are truly thought. This is also certainly one of the ideas presented by Husserlian phenomenology, which Rosenzweig never knew.

Q: *And the influence of Buber and Marcel?*

E.L.: I think rather, as I said at the beginning, that charity is impossible without justice, and that justice is warped without charity.

Not because it succeeded so well, but because it took the Other seriously.

Q: *As a political philosophy, Marxism is nevertheless a philosophy of power, which preaches the conquest of power by violence.*

E.L.: That is true of all political ideologies . . . But in principle those who preach Marxism hoped to make political power useless. That is the idea of some of the most sublime phrases, when Lenin said for example that the day would come when the woman cook would be able to lead a state. That really doesn't mean that she will lead the state, but that the political problem will no longer be posed in today's terms. There is a messianism there. As for what it has become in practice. . . For me, one of the great disappointments of the history of the twentieth century has been that a movement like that produced Stalinism. That is finite!

Q: *In the nineteenth century, there was already that schism between anarchist socialism and Marxist socialism . . .*

E.L.: Of course. But the degeneration of generosity into Stalinism is infinitely more serious.

Q: *In modern Marxism, the idea of a withering away, which was dear to initial Marxism, has disappeared. . .*

E.L.: Perhaps, but there is room for a just state in what I say of the relationship to the other. Our conversation began with that subject.

Q: *Do you think that state could exist?*

E.L.: Yes, there is a possible harmony between ethics and the state. The just state will come from just men and women and saints rather than from propaganda and preaching.

Q: *This love might make the very existence of the state unnecessary, as Aristotle says in the treatise On Friendship.*

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 120

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 120

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 120

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 120

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 120

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 120

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 120

PHILOSOPHY, JUSTICE, AND LOVE 120